

Annex 12. Stakeholders involvement in the Costa Daurada Tourism Observatory, Tarragona

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With more than 150.000 accommodation units and near to 20 million of overnights per year excluding second homes in the area where it has been developed, the Costa Daurada Tourism Observatory of Tarragona (the “Observatory”), has played, since its creation in 2001, a central role both as statistical data producer for the private and public sector but also as part of the system of tourism governance of the destination. The creation, in 1999, of the Costa Daurada Tourist Studies Foundation (FETCD) by the main associative stakeholders of the tourism private sector of the Costa Daurada was followed by the implantation of the first Tourism Observatory of Catalonia in 2001 as an operational unit of the Foundation with the collaboration of the most important municipal tourist boards of the destination and the University Rovira I Virgili.

Map 1. Tarragona main tourism brands and destinations



Nowadays, from the perspective of the private sector, the Costa Daurada Observatory includes the participation, above all, of the Hotel and Tourism Business Federation of Tarragona (FEHT) and several professional organizations both at the provincial and sub-provincial levels, such as the Association of Hotel Entrepreneurs of the Tarragona Province, the Hotel Association of Salou-Cambrils-La Pineda (coastal area), the Tourist Apartments Association of the Costa Daurada and the Campsites Association of the Costa Daurada. It also includes the participation of corporations such as the theme park PortAventura (more than 3,5 million visitors per year) and other private organizations such the Chamber of Commerce of Tarragona. Finally, the private sector has the collaboration of the regional branch office of the main Catalan savings bank “la Caixa”.

From the perspective of the public administration, the Observatory has the proactive role of the Tourist Board of the Provincial Council of Tarragona and the commitment of the Tourist Boards of the four main tourist municipalities of the destinations (Salou, Cambrils, Vila-seca and

Tarragona). The third pillar of the Observatory cooperative network consists of the local higher education and research system, represented by the Rovira I Virgili University (URV), with campuses in the cities of Tarragona, Reus, Vila-seca and Tortosa. Actually, it has to be noted that University plays a fundamental role in this system as, since 2001, its Strategic Research Plan has taken into account the fact that the tourism sector in Catalonia and in Tarragona is one of the main fields of economic activity, in addition to being essential for the regional economy and strategic for socioeconomic development at large. In fact, 'tourism and leisure' is one of the five strategic fields included in the successful project led by the URV to become an "International Campus of Excellence" in Southern Catalonia, promoted in 2009 and officially recognized in 2010.

The Observatory's main mission is to generate information and databases on the tourism dynamics of the Tarragona region in order to facilitate decision-making by local companies and institutions. Data created and analysed is related to two principal axes of information: the occupation of tourist accommodation establishments (hotels, campsites, apartments and rural tourism accommodations) of the destination and characteristics of visitors that arrive to the destination. As a result, the Observatory provides biweekly accommodation statistics disaggregating the information at different geographical scales within the destination (by municipalities, by the whole coastal resort areas, by the regional tourist brands of Costa Daurada and Terres de l'Ebre and for the whole province of Tarragona) and periodical analysis based in questionnaire surveys on the characteristics of tourism demand at the main tourism municipalities and at the two main regional brands of the province of Tarragona previously mentioned. Otherwise, the Observatory carries out *ad hoc* statistical operations at the request of the institutions that are part of it, as well as other institutions, organisations and companies.

Currently the Observatory runs its own data management software for the occupation operation analysis, the Tourism Data System (TDS) interface "TDS" is a web tool providing interactive access to private companies and public stakeholders to the local data on tourism generated by the Observatory in real time. It provides access to current data on the level of occupation of accommodations surveyed, lets view the history of surveying operations conducted since 2006, answers custom queries according to user information need, allows to compare results of one specific property with regard to the results of the different areas of the territory or types and/or level of accommodation and has a repository function of the statistics produced by the Observatory. According to this, currently the Observatory responds to the needs to customize the information available to the companies and generate a fast information access enabling them to act tactically. So, as an interactive platform for information management, this web tool is actually improving the efficiency in the decision making of tourism managers because it provides immediacy in obtaining data and facilitates each company choosing the type of information more useful for its management.

The success of the Costa Daurada Tourism Observatory's has encouraged the emergence of new collaborative projects between tourism businesses, public sector and the University at the destination level. In fact, since the beginning of the 2000 to now, the public and private actors of the Costa Daurada, in collaboration with the Rovira i Virgili University, have developed an intense strategy of generation of innovative mechanisms that involve the joint realization of projects. As a result, nowadays the Costa Daurada Observatory is, in fact, a single unit of the Science & Technology Park for Tourism and Leisure (PCTTO) created in Vila-seca the year 2006 through an agreement between the Rovira i Virgili University, the Hotel and Tourism Business Federation of Tarragona and Vila-seca Town Council enhancing the objectives of the previously created Costa Daurada Tourist Studies Foundation and with the aims of:

- Supporting public and private regional tourism actors in the application, assessment and sharing of current and future knowledge
- Promoting innovation, technological development and sustainable growth among firms and institutions of the region

- Being a “broker” between regional agents and the international knowledge networks of tourism
- Catalyzing and channelling high level academic research in this field
- Creating and disseminating new tourism knowledge, with a special focus on the Catalan, Spanish, Mediterranean and Latin American contexts
- Boosting the development of tourism research streams among research groups of the Rovira I Virgili University.

It can thus be argued that the generation of a cooperative tourism information system such as the Observatory has been followed in this case by new transfer knowledge developments becoming a solid factor of the competitive advantage of the destination, to such an extent that it is managed in the best interest of the local stakeholders. This has occurred, by the way, in a context of the reformulation of the current model of tourism in coastal tourism destinations such as the Costa Daurada of Tarragona. The case, in fact, underlines the importance of the creation of knowledge management instruments in a context of improvement of the competitiveness of a destination and can be understood as an interesting example of local response to the need to intensify the ability to innovate on all levels in the field of tourism and leisure. All in all, the Costa Daurada Tourism Observatory, beyond their description, highlights the usefulness of creating a knowledge-integrated strategy that, beyond *top-down* schemes and policies, cooperates in the creation of successful *bottom-up* transformation dynamics at the destination scale.

FURTHER LINKS:

<http://www.observatoricostadaurada.com>
<http://plataforma.pct-turisme.cat/>
<http://www.pct-turisme.cat/eng/index.php>

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